

Working Together



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May 2019



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION AGENCY

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Remembering the Mission

By Executive Director Shawn Ryan



Every year, the month of May begins with the nationally recognized Public Employees Appreciation Week. Across the country, government employees, publicly-employed first responders and civil service personnel are among those who receive well-deserved honors for their contributions.

At Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), we don't rescue people from burning buildings or intervene in public safety crises. However, the importance of our mission and ability to impact other Georgia citizens is not to be underestimated. In recognizing the dedication of GVRA employees who help people go to work, we must also recognize the imperative with which we are charged to be good stewards, not just of our public dollars, but also with our time and with the effort we put forth.

If you speak with clients each day as a counselor, counselor assistant, AWT professional or team lead, you know who

you are serving, usually by name. For those of us whose jobs don't involve by definition daily interaction with clients, it's easy to lose sight of why every task and every tax dollar matters. Excellent administrative performance means seamless delivery of the resources your coworkers in the field need to help clients who are many times in urgent personal and financial situations.

When an individual walks through the doors of one of our program sites, they are typically without employment, often lacking fiscal stability and sometimes demoralized by unsuccessful prior job searches. Their financial futures and often, their emotional welfare, can be derailed by delays, less-than-courteous service or lack of communication. That said, I firmly believe an overwhelming number of GVRA employees are aware of the critical and noble nature of their work. These are the people I want on our team.

To anyone else who may be discouraged by the monotony of the daily grind or feel isolated from our mission, I remind you, you too serve clients. Those spreadsheets you populate, data you enter and boxes of materials you pack directly impact our ability to support the people who have put their faith in us.

This month, I challenge you to post the mission 'employment and independence for people with disabilities' in a visible place, whether that's a post-it on your desk or a message on a white board. I appreciate all you do. Remember, the clients will too.



Get to Know a Legislator

This Month We Feature Andy Welch



On November 2, 2010, the citizens elected Republican Andy Welch to the Georgia State House. Rep. Welch is married to Cara Welch and is a proud father of three children. He is an active member of the McDonough

Presbyterian Church, serving on the Church's Endowment Committee. He is a partner in Henry County's oldest law firms—Smith Welch and Brittain, LLP—and he is a native of Henry County.

Not only does Andy live and work in Henry County, but his family roots in Henry and Butts counties run deep. The Welchs were early settlers of the Sandy Ridge area of Henry County, along Keys Ferry Road. His family maintains his Grandmother Cola Pope Welch's home and farm along the Ocmulgee River.

Rep. Welch has a long history of commitment to his community, beginning with service projects as an Eagle Scout and most recently his service as the 2010 Chairman of the Henry County Chamber of Commerce. Before becoming Chairman, he served four years on the Chamber's Transportation Committee. During his tenure, the committee spearheaded the business community's push for creation and adoption of an award-winning 2007 Henry County Comprehensive Transportation Plan.

Through 2008 and 2009, Andy worked on the Joint Henry County/Cities Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. He assisted in the identification of infrastructure improvements needed in Henry County to spur economic development. To begin implementation of the Strategy, he assembled a committee of public and private stakeholders to examine the need for and location of an industrial interchange on 1-75 in Henry County to relieve congestion at 1-75 exit 216 (Ga. Hwy 155). As the 2010 Chairman of the Chamber, Andy has focused the Chamber's attention on education, specifically on developing strategies to achieve the Board of Education's goal of 100% high school graduation by 2022.

Rep. Welch's record of service has not been limited to Georgia. While a student at Presbyterian College, he volunteered for two faith-based service missions to re-build homes ravaged by Hurricane Andrew. Immediately following college, Andy served an extended tour with the United States Peace Corps in Ghana, West Africa. There, he taught high school sciences, coached soccer and led the fund-raising and construction of a three-classroom schoolhouse to replace a grass-mat structure. Andy also serves on Congressman Lynn Westmoreland's Transportation and Aviation Advisory Council and United Community Bank's Henry-Rockdale Advisory Board.



CAREER eXploration week

Start your career journey

June 10 - 14
Cave Spring Center

Open to juniors and seniors ages 16—20 (total number of participants is capped at 20). Free of charge for qualifying participants. For the application or for more information, contact Cheryl Leslie at cheryl.leslie@gvs.ga.gov or by phone at (706) 777-2361 or at Georgia Relay: 711.



Cave Spring Center
7 Georgia Avenue
Cave Spring, GA 30124



Super Kids and a Super Event VR at the Soap Box Derby

By Office Assistant Kathy Riner

Team Lead Minnie Lewis of the Reidsville office, Counselor Assistant Denise Flanders and Office Assistant Kathy Riner—the latter two both from the Swainsboro Office—recently attended the Super Kids Soap Box Derby Race in Lyons. The race was aimed at kids ages 7 to 17 who have a disability, with the winner getting to travel to Akron, Ohio to compete in the national finals.

While at the event, the GVRA staff made many connections with school teachers from around the area, including a special education teacher who exclusively teaches blind and/or deaf students. Two of her students were racing in the day's events. The teacher was amazing with her students, supporting them as they were preparing to race and during the awards ceremony.

Contacts were also made with some local businesses. For instance, Kailey Dees with State Farm was very interested in learning about the services VR provides. She got several brochures and a bag for employers to learn about tax benefits of hiring

someone with a disability. She told staff that she would share the information with others. Evan Riekhof of EZ-E Photography who was taking pictures for the event also stopped by the GVRA booth and got information on the services the agency provide. A staff member from Paul Andersen Youth Home was on hand with the kids volunteering, and they received information about GVRA services and a brochure bag to read later.

On the whole, GVRA staff gave out a total of 22 bags filled with brochures and various VR logo items at this event.

They also handed out a total of 52 tumblers filled with candy and VR logo items to all the kids who participated in the race and to the other volunteers.

This was a great event to partner with. GVRA staff is looking forward to next year's event and to grow these partnerships even further.



Celebrating Our Coworkers

State Employee Appreciation Week at GVRA



Gov. Brian Kemp declared the week of May 6 to be State Employee Recognition week, and our coworkers around the state celebrated it in style. This page features scenes from an employee luncheon at Roosevelt Warm Springs.





In honor of State Employee Recognition Week, staff from the GVRA legal and Strategy and Innovation departments celebrated with edible candy bouquets.



Congrats!

Employee of the Month at DAS

The following nomination was submitted by Dianna Scherer in the category of Agency Commitment:

I would like to recommend Kim Jackson for Employee of the Month.

Recently, Kim went above and beyond to assist a co-worker that was out on extended leave. Kim did way more than what was asked of her, completing not just the basic development, but setting up each case she touched for future assessment. She undertook almost all of the CDR development on her co-worker's caseload. She completed the case information screen on each case, and she completed the right side of the MIRS on every case she touched.

She opted not just for the easy cases, but tackled those more difficult cases that usually go untouched. Kim's efforts really meant a lot to the adjudicator, who said she felt cared for by her Unit during a difficult time.

Ms. Jackson was also recognized recently by a medical consultant for her excellent work in developing a claim. The medical consultant stated, "Ms. Jackson, I commend you for your outstanding adjudication and development for this claim. You went the 'extra mile' to consider the indicated SSA

policy for ESRD allowance on this claimant. Excellent job!!! And keep doing these duties to maintain the high working standards of this office."

For these reasons, I believe that Kim Jackson deserves to be the Employee of the Month. She's done much to showcase her commitment to her unit, her outstanding teamwork and the service she provides to her claimants!



Start Now.
Call the GIB Referral Hotline.
1.888.226.3444



Out and About

Project Independence Spreads the Word

By Project Independence Manager Kay McGill

Kay McGill, Statewide Program Manager of Project Independence, recently conducted a presentation at the Douglas Peer Support Group. There were 21 people in attendance.

The Douglas support group is a very involved group. Dr. Ellen Fitzgerald, a doctor in Douglas who specializes in individuals with low vision, is a regular at the group. She sends her patients to the group believing in the benefit she observes when people who are blind or visually impaired are together. Local restaurants provide lunch to the Douglas group (on a rotating basis) paid for by the Coffee County Lions Club.

After the peer leader of the group, Mr. Roger Allen, reviewed the agenda, Kay provided an overview of Project Independence.

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency contracts with six Service Providers located throughout Georgia to provide daily living vision services. This vision program is for those adults age 55 years of age or over and is administered by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. The services provided may help a person remain independent so they can keep doing what they like to do, stay active, travel safely, access resources and interact with peers.

The provider that serves the South Georgia area is:

Visually Impaired Foundation of Georgia (VIFGA), Wendy Mons, CLVT
770-551-8455
1-877-778-4342
www.vifga.org

After the overview of Project Independence,

Kay presented on:

Statistics based on figures from the Behavioral Risk Factor System (BRFSS) Percent of Adults who had Difficulty Seeing 2016-2017 (Georgia)

55-64 99,002 8.2%

65+ 114,344 8.4%

Kay also discussed what it means to have a comfort zone, and how it can change as someone gets older. Once someone learns there are other options that a person can choose, they may take the risk to get out of their comfort zone and learn the new skills or they may choose to stay where they are. It is that person's choice. Knowing there are resources that can help a person make that move forward can provide motivation and hope.

Kay also highlighted the Lions Camp in Waycross. The camp is renovating a building to make it possible for seniors in Project Independence to participate in the camp experience. A number of exciting recreational activities are being offered. GVRA is looking forward to working with the camp so the seniors (those 55 and over) can have a camp experience they may never have had before.

Project Independence supports a number of peer support groups across the state. Being with ones' peers can make all the difference in the world in aiding seniors to maintain their independence and reduce their loneliness and isolation.





Kay McGill with Project Independence speaks to the Douglas Peer Support Group in Coffee County.

Kay used the opportunity to share information about the older blind program at GVRA, letting the group know of resources that are available to them, and encouraging them to explore options that may make mobility and exploration outside the home that much easier.

The program is available to those age 55 and up.





YOU CAN'T MISS THIS HIRING BLITZ

Real jobs. Good pay. Offers made the same day.

What: Part-time jobs paying \$15/hr

Where: Athens VR (150 Evelyn C. Neely Drive, Athens 30601)

When: Thursday, May 16th, 2019 between 1-4 pm

Who: VR Clients, ages 18 and older interested in warehousing opportunities

To register for this event contact: Katherine Lutz (katherine.lutz@gvs.ga.gov) or Valerie Garner (valerie.garner@gvs.ga.gov).

Additional events are planned for Macon and Atlanta. Transportation is not available for this event. For more information and questions, email **Tamie Roper** (tamie.roper@gvs.ga.gov).



**“When you start out
in a team,
you have to get the
teamwork going and
then you get something back.”**

~ Michael Schumacher

All Aboard

By Communications Manager John Boan

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed to this month's GVRA newsletter. This publication serves to showcase all the good work our coworkers do around the state of Georgia, and it wouldn't be possible without that hard work. So thank you.

As always, we're looking for ways we can improve this newsletter and better suit the

interests of our readers. If there's ever anything you'd like included or you know a good success story that would do well to be featured in these pages, please don't hesitate to email me at john.boan@gvs.ga.gov.

Thank you, and see you next month.

www.gvs.ga.gov

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